

## **Red wolf non-essential population management decision Q & A - July 1, 2015**

### **1. What are the Service's future plans for managing the Eastern North Carolina Non-Essential Experimental Red Wolf Population?**

We will continue to manage the Red Wolf Non-Essential Experimental Population (NEP) in accordance with our existing rule and regulation at 50 C.F.R. § 17.84(c). In keeping with our rule, we will no longer release red wolves from our captive population into the recovery area, which is comprised of Beaufort, Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell and Washington counties. The Service is keenly aware that the conservation and recovery of the red wolf cannot be accomplished through its efforts alone. Accordingly, we will work proactively to strengthen our relationships with the State of North Carolina, our partners, and landowners, whose cooperation will be vital to conserving and recovering the species.

The Wildlife Management Institute's (WMI) recently completed evaluation of our Red Wolf Recovery Program and management history of the NEP highlights the need for us to further analyze whether recovery of the red wolf in the wild is feasible at this time. We have already begun to evaluate the NEP and its role in the overall recovery effort of the red wolf. We will continue our evaluation by engaging in additional scientific research into the feasibility of recovering the species via the NEP and anticipate completion of this process by the end of 2015.

### **2. What are some of the actions the Service will undertake to manage the presence of Red Wolves on Private Lands within the NEP area?**

Red wolves are federally-listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, and, therefore, protected on public and private lands. We will, however, continue our efforts to remove red wolves from private lands when requested to do so by the landowner. Private landowners also will be allowed to take animals when authorized by a permit in accordance with our regulation.

Red wolves removed from private lands will be released onto the Alligator River or Pocosin Lake national wildlife refuge. If a wolf has a health or behavioral problem, it will not be returned to the wild but placed in captivity or disposed of in accordance with our management protocols.

We have a variety of other tools and programs available to private landowners who are interested in allowing wildlife management activities for the NEP and other species to occur on their lands. We are developing additional tools and programs to enable landowners to collaborate in managing the NEP.

### **3. Why has the Service decided not to terminate the NEP at this juncture?**

The NEP is the only red wolf population in this country that exists in the wild. It has and continues to provide valuable information on the species' biology and management. Since there are no other red wolf populations in the wild, we need to maintain this population to learn more about the species such as its dispersal patterns, interaction with coyotes, preferred habitats, and susceptibility to diseases as well as matters associated

with managing the species. We have learned much about the red wolf from our management activities and research on the NEP, but many questions that are essential to recovery of the species remain and can only be answered through further study of the NEP. Accordingly, those red wolves that are already on the landscape will remain there unless circumstances require the return of an animal to captivity.

**4. Are you removing the wolves from the landscape?**

No. Those red wolves already in the wild will remain there, and the Service will continue to work with landowners who have red wolves on their property and want them removed. The Service is, however, stopping the release of red wolves into the wild at this time as well.

**5. Were Section 7 consultations completed for all the releases of any wolves from captivity into the wild?**

No, consultation was only completed in 1986 for up to six mated pairs of wolves to be released from captivity. The determination at that time was that the species' reproductive vigor in captivity was secured and its survival was biologically assured. However, all additional releases of captive animals were coordinated with the Species Survival Plan facilities to ensure no negative impacts to the captive population. Releases on private lands occurred with at least verbal permission of the landowner.

**6. Why is the Service conducting a feasibility review of the NEP when it already has the review that was conducted by the Wildlife Management Institute at the Service's request?**

The Wildlife Management Institute was asked to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the science, management, and human dimensions related to the NEP. The evaluation identified areas in which our management actions have been successful as well as those areas that need improvement. The Institute also highlighted a number of areas in which there is uncertainty as well as issues that pose serious challenges to the ultimate recovery of the red wolf in the wild. The scope of our feasibility review will be broader and focus on questions and issues related to whether the overall recovery of the red wolf in the wild is truly attainable in light of the challenges identified in the Institute's evaluation.

**7. What are some of the issues that the Service will consider in the feasibility review of the recovery program?**

We will consider whether there are management techniques available to sufficiently ensure the red wolf's genetic makeup; whether there are geographical areas within the species' historical range that are suitable to serve as core red wolf population sites; if there are suitable geographical areas, whether there is sufficient public and state support in each of those areas to establish three core red wolf populations in accordance with the Red Wolf Recovery Plan; and, whether the red wolf can co-exist with coyotes in the wild. The feasibility review, which will be completed in 2015, will address:

Are management techniques available sufficient to ensure the red wolf's genetic makeup?

Are there areas within the historic range suitable for serving as a core red wolf population sites across its historic range?

Is there enough public and state support in each of these areas for the establishment of three such populations?

Can the red wolf exist in the presence of coyotes?

**8. What canid species occur in the NEP area?**

The canids that occur in the NEP area include red wolves, coyotes, and hybrids from interbreeding between red wolves and coyotes. The Service began managing red wolf hybridization with coyotes in 2000. Since then, the amount of coyote DNA in the NEP has decreased to less than four percent (Gese et al. 2015).

**9. Is the red wolf really a distinct species?**

Although there is disagreement within the scientific community regarding the taxonomy and genetic ancestry of the species, the Service recognizes the red wolf as a distinct species and has listed it as such under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The Service plans to work with its partners to delve further into this issue, with the goal of finding a definitive resolution to this debate.

**10. Why are the Red Wolf Recovery Program and the NEP important to the Service?**

Our September 1987, release of red wolves into the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge marked the first time in this nation's history that a federally-listed species was reintroduced to the historic range from which it had been extirpated. Prior to this reintroduction, the nation's remaining red wolf populations existed solely in captivity. Later, other wolf reintroductions, which were modeled on our program, such as that of the gray wolf into the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, have occurred as a means to recover wolf species in the wild. We have learned a great deal about the red wolf from the NEP, including, but not limited to, the species' dispersal patterns and need for large home ranges. We also have acquired knowledge about the extent to which coyotes threaten red wolves through gene introgression and the importance of maintaining intact red wolf breeding pairs to counter hybridization and coyote expansion. We have gained an increased appreciation of the value and necessity of working in partnership with the state and in effectively engaging and supporting private landowners in our reintroduction effort.

**For questions specifically related to the evaluation completed by the Wildlife Management Institute and other information related to the red wolf, click here:**  
<http://www.fws.gov/redwolf/evaluation.html>